

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: A REVIEW OF THE
FISCAL YEAR 2023 BUDGET REQUEST FOR
THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
AGENCY

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS,
RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: A REVIEW OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGE- MENT AGENCY

Tuesday, June 14, 2022

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS,
RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:15 a.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Val Butler Demings [Chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Demings, Jackson Lee, Payne, Green, Cammack, Higgins, Watson Coleman, Torres, and Garbarino.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery will be in order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare the subcommittee in recess at any point.

I would like to say good morning to everyone. I would like to start this hearing by thanking you, Administrator Criswell, and the FEMA work force for all that you do to fulfill your mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. We are here to discuss FEMA's budget request for fiscal year 2023, management of recent disasters, and preparedness for future ones.

The threat of climate change continues to grow due to increasing temperatures. It appears record-breaking weather is our new reality. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted another above-average hurricane season. In 2021, there were 58 major disaster declarations. This year we have already had 20 major disaster declarations.

In 2017, Hurricane Irma caused 84 deaths in my home State of Florida, and nearly \$50 billion in damages for the United States. In 2020, Hurricane Sally severely impacted Florida and resulted in \$7.3 billion in damages across the Florida Panhandle and Alabama. In 2022 alone, the Florida Forest Service has reported that 37 wildfires have destroyed over 22,000 acres in the State. This year, FEMA's preparedness efforts could very well be impacted by supply chain shortages.

In Florida, we have real concerns about the critical labor and supply chain shortages that are impacting Florida's electric cooperatives and municipalities. These issues highlight the impor-

tance of preparedness for disasters at all levels and certainly creates additional challenges for FMEA's work force.

This subcommittee, without a doubt, recognizes the overwhelming responsibilities placed on FEMA and have held two hearings this year on FEMA's work force. FEMA's work force has experienced several challenges related to recruitment, retention, and training, for example. I understand the FEMA is working to address these challenges and I look forward to hearing more today about how the agency is working to help this incredible work force thrive.

Investing in FMEA's work force ensures that they will continue to be prepared to tackle crises as they emerge. The agency's fiscal year 2023 budget request contains several initiatives to help support and strengthen FEMA's work force, including \$6.4 million for the Incident Management work force.

FEMA administers preparedness grants to States and locals, such as the Urban Areas Security Initiative, UASI, and the State Homeland Security Program. These funds assist States and local jurisdictions with building and maintaining Homeland Security capabilities to prepare for and respond to threats. As a former law enforcement executive, I have seen the benefits of UASI in Orlando and other jurisdictions. When I was a police chief, I relied on the UASI program to help keep my community safe.

Last year, I introduced H.R. 5615, the Homeland Security's Capabilities Preservation Act, which recognizes the importance of preserving security capabilities achieved with UASI funding for communities. I am pleased the legislation passed the House in March. I am confident that this subcommittee will continue to do our part and push for this legislation to become law.

As an advocate for the UASI program, I am concerned about the agency's budget request for fiscal year 2023, which proposes cuts to the Urban Area Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Program. I look forward to our conversation today about these vital programs.

I am pleased, though, to see that the proposed budget request includes \$360 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which is \$110 million above fiscal year 2022 funding. The proposed funding increase is especially important in recent years because we have seen a spate of threats against nonprofits, specifically houses of worship and including 36 bomb threats to Historically Black Colleges and Universities alone.

This year, we have seen the value of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. For example, Rabbi Cytron-Walker recalled training funded by the program helped him and congregants escape an armed individual, who was holding them hostage at a Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas.

Furthermore, I am a proud sponsor of Chairman Thompson's legislation, H.R. 7668, the Federal Emergency Management Advancement of Equity Act, which is a tremendous step in making certain that disaster response more adequately meets the needs in the most vulnerable areas throughout our Nation.

I look forward to hearing from you, Administrator Criswell, about how the proposed budget helps bolster FEMA's readiness to

tackle the ever-growing threats and how Congress can continue to assist in supporting your mission.

[The statement of Chairwoman Demings follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN VAL DEMINGS

JUNE 14, 2022

I would like to start the hearing by thanking you, Administrator Criswell, and the FEMA workforce for all that you do to fulfill your mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. In recent years, FEMA has faced several challenges, which will only continue to grow due to climate change.

As the threat of climate change continues to grow due to increasing temperatures, record-breaking weather is our new reality. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted another above-average hurricane season. In 2021 there were 58 major disaster declarations. This year we have already had 20 major disaster declarations.

In Florida, we have experienced multiple extreme weather events over the years. In 2017, Hurricane Irma caused 84 deaths in my home State of Florida, and nearly \$50 billion in damages for the United States. In 2020, Hurricane Sally, severely impacted Florida and resulted in \$7.3 billion in damages across the Florida Panhandle and Alabama. In 2022 alone, the Florida Forest Service has reported that 37 wildfires have destroyed over 22,000 acres in the State. This year, FEMA's preparedness efforts must contend with supply chain problems. In Florida, we have real concerns about the critical labor and supply chain shortages that are impacting affecting Florida's electric cooperatives and municipalities. These issues highlight the importance of preparedness for disasters at all levels. Disasters impact communities on all fronts, but it also impacts our FEMA workforce.

However, disaster after disaster, FEMA has continuously risen to the challenge, but a changing threat landscape will only further add to FEMA's already burdened workload. I recognize the overwhelming responsibilities placed on FEMA and have held two hearings this year on FEMA's workforce. FEMA's workforce has experienced several challenges related to recruitment, retention, training, and harassment. I understand that FEMA is working to address these challenges and I look forward to hearing more today about how the agency is working to help this incredible workforce thrive. Investing in FEMA's workforce ensures that they will continue to be prepared to tackle crises as they emerge. The agency's fiscal year 2023 budget request contains several initiatives to help support and strengthen FEMA's workforce, including \$6.4 million for the Incident Management workforce.

FEMA administers preparedness grants to States and locals, such as the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) and the State Homeland Security Program. These funds assist State and local jurisdictions with building and maintaining homeland security capabilities to prepare for and respond to threats. During my 27-year career in law enforcement and now as a Member of Congress, I have seen the benefits of UASI particularly in Orlando. When I was a chief of police, I relied on the UASI program to help keep my community safe.

Last year, I introduced, H.R. 5615, the Homeland Security Capabilities Preservation Act, which recognizes the importance of preserving security capabilities achieved with UASI funding for communities. I am pleased that the legislation passed the House in March. I will continue to do my part and push for this legislation until it becomes law. As an advocate for the UASI program, I am concerned about the agency's budget request for fiscal year 2023, which proposes cuts to the Urban Area Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Program. I look forward to our conversation today about these vital programs.

I am grateful to see that FEMA's proposed budget, requests \$360 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which is \$110 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted funding. The proposed funding increase is especially important because in recent years, we have seen a spate of threats against nonprofits, specifically houses of worship and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This year, we have seen the value of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. For example, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker recalled training funded by the program to help himself and congregants escape an armed individual, who was holding them hostage, at Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas.

Additionally, in 2022 alone, there have been at least 36 bomb threats to HBCUs. These threats demand a response, and I will continue to advocate for resources, such as the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, to keep houses of worship and our students safe. As we respond to the challenges at hand, we must also recognize that

disasters, and disaster recovery, do not impact individuals the same way; some communities are more vulnerable than others. I commend Administrator Criswell and the Biden administration for taking steps to protect those who are most vulnerable by integrating equity into initiatives such as the 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan, which instills equity as a foundation for emergency management as its primary goal.

Furthermore, I am a proud cosponsor of Chairman Bennie Thompson’s legislation, H.R. 7668, the Federal Emergency Management Advancement of Equity Act, which is a tremendous step in making disaster response efforts fairer and more effective. I look forward to hearing from Administrator Criswell about how the proposed budget helps bolster FEMA and its ability to tackle the ever-growing threats and what Congress can do to assist.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Subcommittee, the gentlewoman of Florida, Mrs. Cammack, for her opening statement.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, thank you, Chairwoman Demings, for holding this important hearing today. Thank you to Administrator Criswell for being here before us.

As Floridians, of course, I think there is far more that we agree on when it comes to this issue than most others. So, I am excited for today’s hearing.

As we all know, FEMA’s mission is to help people before, during, and after disasters. I put an emphasis on before because I think collectively when we place an emphasis on mitigation, we are better for it in the aftermath.

With the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season entering its second week this mission cannot be understated—overstated. As representatives from Florida, I know that the Chairwoman and I both agree that our State certainly has seen its fair share of natural disasters. During my time as the Ranking Member of this subcommittee I have gained a deeper appreciation for the vital work that FEMA does and for the men and women that comprise FEMA’s work force. I have also seen first-hand the incredible amount of work that we have ahead of us, but I feel confident that we will succeed.

For example, the suite of preparedness grants administered by FEMA provides critical support so that State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments have the resources necessary to keep our communities safe. Following the horrific attack against the Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, I was pleased to see the increase to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program to \$360 million for fiscal year 2023.

Similarly, I was very pleased to see an increase of \$10 million in the fiscal year 2023 request from the fiscal year 2022 enacted levels for both the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire Emergency Response, the SAFER Grant Programs. As the wife of a proud—as the proud wife of a firefighter I know how important and necessary these grants are, not only for our professional and career departments, but for our nearly 30,000 volunteer fire departments across the United States. Sometimes I feel like they are a little bit of our—the redheaded stepchild and they don’t get near enough attention. So, today I am going to be talking about their needs as well and how FEMA can better serve our volunteer departments.

The fiscal year 2023 budget request also includes \$312 million for education, training, and exercises, including \$8 million for FEMA's Emergency Management Institute to expand satellite partnerships, develop leadership programs, and modernize virtual technology systems, among other items. It is important that through EMI and FEMA's other educational facilities that we ensure resources and training remain accessible to communities across the country, including our rural communities.

I look forward to hearing more from the administrator on EMI's requests and additional initiatives that seek to improve the invaluable training for our Nation's emergency responders.

Additionally, while not explicitly laid out in the budget, I am encouraged to learn of FEMA's recently-released building code strategy which seeks to organize and prioritize FEMA's activities to advance the adoption and enforcement of hazard-resistant building codes and standards for FEMA programs. As we learned from the University of Florida professor Dr. David Prevatt—Go Gators—who submitted written testimony for our last subcommittee hearing, our better building construction can narrow the width of the most catastrophic destruction, so that homes, while possibly experiencing damage, can remain habitable immediately following a disaster. Not only does better building construction immensely benefit the disaster survivor, but there is potential for significant saving costs—cost savings.

While much of FEMA's fiscal year 2023 budget seems fairly straightforward, I still have major concerns regarding FEMA's emergency food and shelter program. The 2023 request includes \$24 million to provide shelter and other services to families and individuals encountered by the Department of Homeland Security. Now, although \$24 million is less than \$150 million enacted for fiscal year 2022, it is not an insignificant number. At a time when Americans are having to make the choice between gas or groceries and those on fixed incomes are seeing their rents skyrocket, I have to ask why so much of American tax dollars are going to house illegal immigrants.

I would also like at this time to mention my concerns with FEMA's Funeral Assistance Program.

During a full committee hearing last year I asked you, Administrator Criswell, if there were enough safeguards in place to ensure that fraud throughout the program would not be rampant. During that hearing you assured me that FEMA was taking the necessary precautions. However, both the DHS Office of Inspector General and the GAO recently released reports detailing instances of fraud within the program. That, of course, has led to abuse and waste of taxpayer dollars. Given that this program has paid out over \$2.5 billion with a B, I look forward to hearing more on the program today and the steps that you and FEMA are taking to ensure that these issues are corrected.

Again, I want to thank you, Administrator Criswell, for appearing before us today. I am eager to learn of FEMA's priorities for the coming year and how this budget request supports our goals. I know that we have sparred a bit over these last 16 months over various issues, but I want to assure you and my colleagues and Americans that we are here and we have to ask the tough ques-

tions and conduct the actual oversight if we are going to be effective in FEMA's mission.

As always, thank you to our FEMA work force, our first responders, our emergency managers, and community partners at every level of government. Your ability to adapt to ever-changing threats and vulnerabilities ensures that our Nation's continued ability to prevent, prepare, and mitigate, respond to, and recover from the threats and hazards we face daily.

With that, Madam Chairwoman, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Cammack follows:]

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE KAT CAMMACK

JUNE 14, 2022

Thank you, Chairwoman Demings, for holding this important hearing, and thank you to Administrator Criswell for appearing before us today.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) mission is to help people before, during, and after disasters. With the 2022 Atlantic Hurricane Season entering its second week, this mission cannot be understated. As Representatives from Florida, I know that the Chairwoman and I can both agree that our State has certainly seen its fair share of natural disasters.

During my time as the Ranking Member of this subcommittee, I've gained a deeper appreciation for the vital work that FEMA does, and for the men and women that comprise FEMA's workforce.

For example, the suite of preparedness grants administered by FEMA provides critical support so that State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments have the resources necessary to keep our communities safe. Following the horrific attack against the Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, I was pleased to see the increase to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program to \$360 million in the fiscal year 2023 budget request. Similarly, I was very pleased to see an increase of \$10 million in the fiscal year 2023 request from the fiscal year 2022 enacted levels for both the Assistance to Firefighters grant program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program. As the proud wife of a firefighter, I know how important and necessary these grants are.

The fiscal year 2023 budget request also includes \$312.1 million for Education, Training, and Exercises, including \$8 million for FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI), to expand satellite partnerships, develop leadership programs, and modernize virtual technology systems, among other items. It is important that through EMI and FEMA's other educational facilities, that we ensure resources and training remain accessible to communities across the country, including rural communities. I look forward to hearing more from the administrator on EMI's request and additional initiatives that seek to improve the invaluable training for our Nation's emergency responders.

Additionally, while not explicitly laid out in the budget, I was pleased to learn of FEMA's recently released Building Codes Strategy, which seeks to organize and prioritize FEMA activities to advance the adoption and enforcement of hazard-resistant building codes and standards for FEMA programs. As we learned from University of Florida professor, Dr. David Prevatt, who submitted written testimony for our last subcommittee hearing, better building construction can narrow the width of the most catastrophic destruction, so that homes, while possibly experiencing damage, remain habitable immediately after a disaster. Not only does better building construction immensely benefit the disaster survivor, there is also the potential for significant cost savings.

While much of FEMA's fiscal year 2023 budget request seems fairly straightforward, I still have concerns regarding FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program. The fiscal year 2023 request includes \$24 million to provide shelter and other services to families and individuals encountered by the Department of Homeland Security. Although \$24 million is less than the \$150 million enacted for fiscal year 2022, it is not an insignificant number.

I would also like to take this time to mention my concerns with FEMA's Funeral Assistance Program. During a full committee hearing last year, I asked you, Administrator Criswell, if there were enough safeguards in place to ensure that fraud throughout the program was not rampant. During that hearing, you assured me that FEMA was taking the necessary precautions. However, both the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) re-

cently released reports detailing instances of fraud within the program, that of course, has led to abuse and waste of taxpayer dollars. Given the fact that this program has paid out over \$2.5 billion, I look forward to hearing more on this program today, and the steps that FEMA is taking to ensure that these issues are corrected.

Thank you again to the administrator for appearing before us today, I am eager to learn of FEMA's priorities for the coming year and how the fiscal year 2023 budget request supports those goals.

As always, thank you to our FEMA workforce, first responders, emergency managers, and community partners at every level of government. Your ability to adapt to ever-changing threats and vulnerabilities ensures our Nation's continued ability to prevent, prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from the threats and hazards we face daily.

With that, I yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I want to thank the Ranking Member for her opening statement. You know, as I think about the safety and security of the people that we represent, I don't believe there are any tough questions that we are not prepared for or laser-focused on providing the necessary services. So, thank you for your opening statement.

Members are reminded that the committee will operate according to the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and Ranking Member in their February 3, 2021, colloquy regarding remote procedures. Without objection, Members not on the subcommittee shall be permitted to sit and question the witnesses. Members may also submit statements for the record.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JUNE 14, 2022

Hurricane Season began on June 1, and we have already seen one named storm, Alex, in the Atlantic.

This is just the beginning of what is predicted to be another above-average hurricane season. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicted up to 21 named Atlantic storms.

Severe weather is on the rise. We saw more category 4 and 5 hurricanes from 2017 to 2021—5 years—than in the past 50 years. The threat of climate change is real and present.

In Mississippi, we have seen increasingly dangerous heat waves, and scientists project increased drought in the future. In addition to extreme heat, last June my district experienced devastating, 100-year flooding. There is a lot we can do to mitigate the suffering caused by these natural disasters, but it depends in significant part on having a ready and able FEMA. Unfortunately, severe weather is not the only challenge facing the agency.

FEMA continues to work on the COVID-19 response and has been called on to provide Southwest Border Coordination Support. FEMA also plays an important role in advancing public safety, which is imperative given that our Nation has already suffered over 230 mass violence events this year. Through its Homeland Security Grant Programs, FEMA administers critical funding to help protect our communities from violence and terrorism. Specifically, the administration's budget proposes \$360 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, a \$110 million increase. This critical program helps nonprofits protect against terrorist threats.

My legislation, the Nonprofit Security Grant Program Improvement Act of 2022 (H.R. 6825), authorizes the program at \$500 million annually through fiscal year 2028. The House passed the bill in May, and I encourage my colleagues in the Senate to do the same.

Last, I look forward to discussing my bill, the FEMA Equity Act, with the administrator. This legislation would integrate equity throughout FEMA policies and programming. The bill was drafted after the State of Mississippi failed to do its part to address devastation caused by the June floods.

Too often those most in need are left behind when disaster strikes. My bill aims to change that so every American, regardless of where they live, how much money they have, or the color of their skin, gets the assistance they need after a disaster

strikes. I would also like to thank Senator Warren and Chairwoman Demings for their partnership in introducing this bill with me.

At today's hearing, I hope to hear a robust conversation on what it looks like to integrate equity into FEMA's policies. On that note, I would like to thank Administrator Criswell for coming before the committee today. I commend you on the work FEMA is doing to advance equity throughout its programming and prepare for future disasters. I look forward to hearing from the administrator about the fiscal year 2023 budget and how Congress can support FEMA in meeting the challenges ahead.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I welcome our witness, Deanne Criswell, the administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Ms. Criswell is the 12th administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and is the first Senate-confirmed woman to lead the agency. Prior to her appointment Administrator Criswell was the commissioner for the New York Emergency Management Department, where she coordinated emergency planning and response for all emergencies, including COVID-19.

Previously, Administrator Criswell worked for FEMA as a Federal coordinating officer, where she was the primary Federal representative responsible for leading the agency's response during declared disasters.

Without objection, the witness' full statement will be inserted in the record.

I now ask Administrator Criswell to summarize her statement for 5 minutes. Good morning.

STATEMENT OF DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Ms. CRISWELL. Good morning, Chairwoman Demings, Ranking Member Cammack, and Members of the subcommittee. Thank you very much for inviting me here today to talk about our fiscal year 2023 budget request.

As you have mentioned in your statements, the field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment in its history. While our mission itself has not changed, our operating environment has. Ten years ago, we managed an average of 108 disasters a year. Today, as of June 10, we are managing 348. This includes the on-going response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The changing climate is the biggest crisis facing our Nation and makes natural disasters more frequent and more destructive. At the same time, structural inequities in our society are compounding the impacts of disasters for underserved communities. Our budget request for FEMA ensures that the agency can meet these challenges and continue to help people before, during, and after disasters.

FEMA aligned its budget request to support the three goals in our strategic plan. First, as an agency, we must instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. We must recognize that disasters affect individuals and communities differently. Our strategic plan focuses our entire agency on putting people first and reducing barriers to our programs.

We have already made important changes on how we provide assistance. For instance, some homeowners had difficulty proving that they own their homes and if their property had been handed

down through the generations. We expanded the types of documentation that we can accept, including receipts for major repairs or improvements, court documents, public officials' letters, and even applicant self-certification for mobile homes and travel trailers as a last resort.

In addition, we changed the way that we calculate the threshold for property losses to qualify for a direct housing program. This resulted in more than 2,700 families receiving assistance who would not have been considered for direct housing in the past. That means over 2,700 families with a roof over their head, a bed to sleep in, and a stove to cook with.

We also know the more our work force resembles the Nation we serve, the better that we will serve it. We are adapting our recruiting efforts to reach individuals from underrepresented communities by partnering with organizations like Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions.

Second, we must lead the whole community in climate resilience. FEMA is not just a response-and-recovery agency. One of my highest priorities is hazard mitigation. Congress' investment in hazard mitigation has been strong. We have seen it most recently through the appropriation of \$6.8 billion in mitigation funds to FEMA in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021, including funding to establish revolving loan funds under the STORM Act. The budget request includes \$3.4 billion for further investments, including the Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities Program, our Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, flood maps, and the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. We think innovatively and shift our projects to those with community-wide impact. We must eliminate the barriers underserved communities face in seeking hazard mitigation assistance.

Third, we must promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared Nation. The increased frequency, severity, and complexity of disasters has heightened demands on FEMA's work force and on the broader emergency management community. FEMA's request includes \$19.7 billion for the Disaster Relief Fund to address current and future disasters.

To reach this number, FEMA worked shoulder-to-shoulder with disaster-impacted States and localities to understand their recovery needs from on-going catastrophic disasters, in addition to evaluating the historical cost average for non-catastrophic disasters, the allocation of funds for BRIC, and a reserve to ensure FEMA maintains the ability to fund initial response operations for new significant events.

While natural disasters are at the forefront of our discussions today, we cannot overlook our threats facing our Nation, which FEMA has also charged—has been charged with helping to mitigate. Like natural disasters, terrorist attacks can occur at any time, anywhere. We saw this earlier this year during a hostage standoff at the Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in Colleyville, Texas. I visited the synagogue and spoke to the rabbi following the attack, and he related to me, as you mentioned, Chairwoman, of the importance of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program and how it helped to save lives. We are requesting \$360 million for this program to continue this effort.

The unrelenting pace of a year-round disaster cycle and crises places great demands on our FEMA work force. We must look out for the physical, the emotional, and the mental health of our work force. Their adaptability, their dedication, and willingness to do the hard work is extraordinary. I believe that the President's budget request will enable them to continue to do their incredible work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Criswell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEANNE CRISWELL

JUNE 14, 2022

Chair Demings, Ranking Member Cammack, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss the 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan and the President's fiscal year 2023 budget request.

The field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment in its history. There are tremendous changes to the risk landscape facing this Nation and to our professional roles. While our mission has not changed, our operating environment has. Ten years ago, we managed an average of 108 disasters a year. Today, as of June 10, we are managing 348—including the on-going response to the COVID–19 pandemic. Between 2015 and 2021 alone, FEMA experienced a 165 percent increase in the number of staff who deployed to support disaster operations for more than 30 days, and an unprecedented 346 percent increase in the number of days FEMA personnel were deployed to disaster operations annually. Weather is becoming more extreme, more intense, and more powerful. Disasters are no longer falling within certain months of the year. Instead, disaster season is year-long.

The changing climate is the biggest crisis facing our Nation. It makes natural disasters more frequent and more destructive, and this pattern will continue for the foreseeable future. We have seen this recently with the severe winter storms, derechos, hurricanes, and the increasing frequency and size of wildfires throughout the Nation. At the same time, structural inequities in our society are compounding the impacts of disasters for underserved communities. Left unaddressed, these challenges pose unacceptable risks to our citizens. These disaster events—and so many others—require FEMA to respond more frequently and with greater resources than ever before in our history. The FEMA fiscal year 2023 budget request ensures the agency can continue to meet these challenges and be prepared for the future as it helps people before, during, and after disasters.

FEMA aligned its budget request to support goals outlined in our 2022–2026 Strategic Plan. These goals are: (1) Instill equity as a foundation of emergency management; (2) lead the whole of community in climate resilience; and (3) promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared Nation. Our budget request reflects our continued intent to execute our mission, while effectively and efficiently managing resources. It allows us to coordinate response, recovery, mitigation, and preparedness missions while maintaining a highly-skilled team of employees who are ready and able to respond to on-going and future disasters of any kind. Concurrently, it allows us to remain focused on our on-going COVID–19 efforts as we transition to the new normal.

INSTILL EQUITY AS A FOUNDATION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

As an agency, we must instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. It is important we recognize disasters affect individuals and communities differently. We must commit ourselves to eliminate barriers to access and pledge to deliver equitable outcomes for all survivors. FEMA meets disaster survivors who just experienced their worst day, and we must ensure our policies and programs meet them where they are and provide support in an accessible and user-friendly way. Systems which create barriers and result in inequitable outcomes serve no one, especially in times of crisis. Our Strategic Plan focuses our entire agency on putting people first and reducing the barriers to individuals and communities accessing our programs.

We have already made important changes to the way we provide assistance. For instance, some homeowners had difficulty proving they owned their homes if their property had been handed down from generation to generation through the years. We took action by expanding the types of ownership documentation we can accept, including documents like receipts for major repairs or improvements, court docu-

ments, public officials' letters, mobile home park letters, and even applicant self-certification for mobile homes and travel trailers as a last resort. In addition, FEMA has changed the way we calculate the threshold for property losses to qualify for our Direct Housing program (such as a trailer or mobile home). Our goal is to ensure equitable damage evaluations regardless of the amount of damage to the home. Changing the calculation of the threshold from a fixed-dollar floor of \$17,000 to a simpler \$12 per square foot, resulted in more than 2,770 families receiving assistance who would not have been considered for direct housing in the past. That means 2,770 families with a roof over their head, beds to sleep in, and a stove to cook with. This change especially made a difference for survivors with lower-value homes. These are a few examples of where our people-first approach has made a difference. But we can do more. We will do more.

We also know, the more our workforce resembles the Nation we serve, the better we will be at serving our Nation. Which is why our Strategic Plan focuses our recruiting efforts to reach individuals from underrepresented communities, including through the Emergency Management Institute and partnering with organizations like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium of Tribal Colleges and Universities and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Our goal is to create hiring pipelines from these institutions into the field of emergency management, opening new opportunities for underrepresented communities who may not see themselves reflected in today's workforce, and as a result, may have been dissuaded from joining the emergency management profession.

LEAD WHOLE-OF-COMMUNITY IN CLIMATE RESILIENCE

FEMA is not just a response and recovery agency. One of my highest priorities is to focus equally on hazard mitigation. What we can do to prevent a disaster is often as important as what we do after disaster strikes. We must recognize our climate crisis and integrate future conditions into our planning efforts now. Historically, Congress' investment in hazard mitigation has been strong. We have seen this through your support of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program in 2018. We've seen it through the appropriation of \$6.8 billion in funds to FEMA in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021, including funding to establish revolving loan funds under the STORM Act. We thank you for your support and for working with the Biden-Harris administration to pass this legislation.

We must think innovatively as we approach disaster hazard mitigation and shift our projects to those with community-wide impact. We must eliminate the barriers underserved communities face when seeking hazard mitigation assistance. These investments will only grow in importance as climate change continues to alter the landscape of risk facing emergency managers across the country. Which is why we made resources available, such as new Direct Technical Assistance, for local communities to provide support for both project and application-specific needs, as well as community-wide resilience needs.

Our fiscal year 2023 budget request includes \$3.4 billion to support strategies to address climate change through community partnerships. This includes further investments in BRIC, our Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, flood maps, and the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. Specifically, we are setting aside another \$1 billion of the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) exclusively for the BRIC program. This set-aside will help communities build capacity by funding hazard mitigation projects such as seismic retrofits, stormwater management plans, construction of flood control and floodways, and many other projects to reduce risks at the State, local, Tribal, and territorial (SLTT) levels. The funding is in addition to the bipartisan IIJA's \$1 billion over 5 years to implement BRIC. Our fiscal year 2023 request also includes more than \$500 million to update FEMA's inventory of maps, including to show future flood risk conditions. Flood risk can change over time due to fluctuating weather patterns, new building and development, and other factors. FEMA will continue to work with its SLTT governmental partners Nation-wide to identify flood risk and promote informed planning and development practices to reduce risk.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, since 1980, total costs associated with severe storms and flooding estimates are \$345 billion and \$168 billion, respectively. Climate change projections suggest wildfires and storms will likely become more frequent and stronger in many regions in the country. The Federal Government is taking steps to ensure Federal investments include standards of safety against climate hazards, floods, and sea-level rise in order to make communities more resilient to flooding. The fiscal year 2023 funding allows us to

support the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and its climate-informed, science-based activities with the purpose of preparing for future flood conditions.

Additionally, FEMA will implement a National strategy for its programs, and provide leadership to an all-of-government initiative to advance the adoption of disaster-resistant building codes that will strengthen buildings, including against climate-induced disaster impacts. This will increase FEMA's ability to provide the information, awareness, guidance, tools, and support required at the SLTT levels to save lives and reduce losses. A 2019 study by the National Institute of Building Sciences found that adopting the latest building codes save \$11 dollars for every dollar invested.

PROMOTE AND SUSTAIN A READY FEMA AND A PREPARED NATION

The increased frequency, severity, and complexity of disasters has heightened demands on FEMA's workforce and on the first responder community in every State, territory, Tribal nation, county, and city in the Nation which comprise the broader emergency management community. To rise to this challenge, FEMA must expand its approach to agency readiness and to National preparedness.

FEMA's request includes \$19.7 billion for the DRF to address current and future disasters. To reach this number, FEMA worked shoulder-to-shoulder with disaster-impacted States and localities to understand their recovery needs from on-going catastrophic disasters, in addition to evaluating the historical cost average for non-catastrophic disasters; the previously-mentioned allocation for BRIC; and a reserve to ensure FEMA maintains the ability to fund initial response operations for new significant events.

Like disasters, terrorist attacks can occur at any time and at any place. Tragically, we were reminded of this reality earlier this year during a hostage stand-off at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, demonstrating that threats to the United States no longer exist only in major population centers. The risk of terrorism exists everywhere in America. As the threats we face evolve, so too must the grant programs created to prepare for those threats. Non-profit organizations require assistance to harden their facilities and provide other security enhancements that will mitigate and thwart terrorist attacks. I visited the Congregation Beth Israel and spoke to the Rabbi at the synagogue following the attack. He relayed to me of the importance of this program and how it helped save lives. His experience only reinforced our request to Congress for \$360 million for the Non-profit Security Grant Program. Thank you for your support of this program.

We must also protect our Nation's networks and infrastructure from evolving cybersecurity threats. The bipartisan IIJA law also provided \$1 billion over 4 years to improve SLTT cybersecurity and critical infrastructure. The fiscal year 2023 President's budget includes a request for \$80 million, which will complement the IIJA funding by establishing a competitive grant program, which will be administered by FEMA, but leverage the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) subject-matter expertise. Under the proposed program, funds are competitively awarded to owners and operators of critical infrastructure based on identified risks and vulnerabilities associated with emerging threats or identified gaps within the systems and networks of the assets within their control. The funding will bolster efforts to prevent cyber attacks and to ensure critical infrastructure providers can continue to deliver their vital services to Americans uninterrupted.

In recent years we have seen an uptick in Nation-wide crises which do not fall within the statutory definition of a disaster. When the Nation faced such events, FEMA was called on to provide incident management support for the Federal response such as Operations Allies Welcome, the Southwest Border Coordination Center, and the Russia/Ukraine Domestic Preparedness and Response Unified Coordination Group. FEMA has unique expertise in the Federal Government to provide such support, but it must be better prepared to respond to similar missions and events in the future. We request an additional \$1.8 million to maintain the Non-Stafford Act Incident Management Assistance Team, a program funded in the fiscal year 2022 enactment. This will provide an enduring capability to respond to incidents requiring incident management support.

We are also in the process of looking at the architecture of our Stafford Act disaster workforce to better meet the challenges of the year-long operational tempo which is our new reality. As FEMA's incident management and incident support workforce continues to grow, we are prioritizing the growth of the support workforce which enables them, such as the procurement specialists needed to execute the contracts and mission assignments, which allows us to actually mobilize assistance; the computer specialists who facilitate data and information sharing within FEMA's IT infrastructure; those who ensure civil rights are protected in all activities; and the

personnel necessary to train the workforce, manage operations, and focus on employee wellness.

The last group is so critical. Dealing with an unrelenting pace of a year-round cycle of disasters and crisis takes its toll on the FEMA team. To be ready for the next disaster, whenever it comes, we must look out for the physical, emotional, and mental health of our people. We are looking at ways to let our people rest and reset, to take care of themselves, and make sure their families are taken care of. We cannot do what we do without our people. Their adaptability, dedication, and willingness to do the hard work is unquestionable and unbelievable.

Emergency management is at a pivotal moment in history. We are witnessing tremendous change in the landscape of risk and in our professional roles. While our core mission has not changed, our operating environment has. The 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan and fiscal year 2023 budget request are consistent with and support the challenges we face. I look forward to working with you as we continue to build a ready FEMA and more resilient Nation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I want to thank Administrator Deanne Criswell for your testimony. I will remind each Member that he or she will have 5 minutes to question the witness. I will now recognize myself for questions.

Administrator, no one knows better than you here today that 2 weeks ago marked the beginning of hurricane season. You also pointed out a decade ago we had roughly 108 disasters. Now we are looking at 348 roughly. Things have definitely changed and increased.

When we think about the challenges that we now face is the FEMA work force prepared for what is predicted to be an above-average hurricane season?

Ms. CRISWELL. Chairwoman Demings, I do believe that our work force is prepared. We have one of the most dedicated work forces that I think you can find anywhere in the Federal Government and they are committed to our mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters.

While we have seen the increase in the number of disasters, our team continues to look at ways that we can staff these events and not have an added strain on our members. We are taking a look right now at taking a step back at now that we have more of this year-long operational tempo instead of the peak that we have traditionally seen during hurricane seasons, what does the future staffing model need to look like? We are doing a deep dive into that analysis so we can better plan and appropriate our staff. For year-long responses we continue to go forward.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. One of the top issues that we are dealing with certainly here in the United States, but around the world, centers around supply chain shortages. How are you working with local government and the private sector to employ supply chain mitigation efforts in advance of disaster striking?

Ms. CRISWELL. We are very concerned, as the rest of Americans are, on the impacts that the supply chain is having across the Nation. But we have built a stockpile of our response requirements at our distribution centers across the Nation. So, I feel confident that the stockpile of equipment and supplies that we have will meet the needs for any disaster response that we have going into this hurricane season.

But through our regional administrators, they are the belly-button that are working with our State and local officials, State and local emergency managers to understand what their gaps are.

It is through those on-going conversations that our regional administrators have a better understanding of where their needs might be, and then we can be better prepared to support them if we need to come in and help after a disaster.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Have you been able to coordinate with the private sector?

Ms. CRISWELL. We have a private sector office at FEMA that works continuously across the different industries to better understand where they are at and what their needs are going to be. We have also initiated an analysis of what the potential supply chain impacts will be for this hurricane season through one of our contracts, and we expect the results of that sometime in the next few weeks.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you. As a former law enforcement professional, I have already indicated the importance of grant programs like UASI and how beneficial they are to local and State government in terms of preparing for threats of any kind. I was certainly disappointed to hear about the cut in funding for this particular program knowing that law enforcement is, as you well know, on the front line. Could you talk about, based on your experience, how you believe local jurisdictions will be impacted by the reduced funding?

Ms. CRISWELL. There is no doubt that our Homeland Security suite of programs that we have has increased the capacity for local jurisdictions across this country, whether it is our UASI programs or our State Homeland Security Programs or Nonprofit Security Grant Programs. As we have seen the capacity in primarily our UASI program and our Homeland Security Program increase the capabilities across the Nation, we also recognize that there is a need to increase capacity in other areas. That is one of the reasons that we have asked for the increase in our Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

But to get specifically to your question, I would say one of the biggest things that we have also been asking our local jurisdictions to spend their UASI money on is cyber preparedness. We have an additional grant program that will be coming out as we partner with CISA that is focused specifically on cyber preparedness. So now we no longer are going to require our local jurisdictions to have a maximum or mandatory spend on cyber because they will have this additional program. They can use that funding for their other capacity-related needs.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you, Administrator Criswell. I now recognize the Ranking Member, the gentlewoman from Florida, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you, Chairwoman Demings. Thank you again, Administrator Criswell.

Before we get into questions, I know you and I as well as our respective teams have chatted at length about outstanding project worksheets from previous storms and events. I would like to get your commitment to responding with the status of it.

Within 30 days?

Ms. CRISWELL. You have my commitment to respond within 30 days.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you so much. So, I alluded to my concerns in my opening statement about this administration's prioritization of illegals at the border over American citizens, particularly as we are facing record inflation. So, in fiscal year 2021 there were 1.7 million illegals encountered at the Southwest Border. FEMA actually spent \$150 million in response to this crisis, using \$150 million for housing and food.

Now, fast-forward to April of this year, 2022. There were 234,000 migrant encounters along the Southwest Border, which is the highest number of monthly encounters in the last two decades. Now, this year's budget request, fiscal year 2023, includes \$24 million for FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program for the purpose of providing shelter and other services to families and individuals encountered by the DHS at the Southwest Border.

The President's fiscal year 2023 budget request states that, "Communities are providing food, shelter, transportation, COVID-19 testing, and care associated with recommended quarantining and isolation of this population, and incurring the cost of this relief. The use of hotels and non-congregant space remains as a prevalent solution and will remain for the foreseeable future even if COVID-19 concerns decrease."

So, I find it very troubling that in the budget request specifically mentions increased cost associated with COVID-19 precautions, yet there are still consideration from the administration to lift Title 42, which, of course, as we know, is a CDC directive. Do you anticipate additional migrant encounters along the Southwest Border? If so, will FEMA be requesting additional funds through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program to address the crisis at the border?

Ms. CRISWELL. Ranking Member Cammack, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program has been a great tool to support the humanitarian needs at the border. It is a program that is funded by FEMA, but run through a board of directors of nonprofit organizations. The things that you mentioned, such as transportation, shelter, and food, are eligible expenses by these nonprofit agencies to be able to fund the needs that they are encountering.

I do not know what the potential increase in the number of border encounters is going to be as I am not an immigrant agency. But we will work closely with the Secretary and his staff as we monitor what the border is needing. If we need to make a request, we would certainly consult with the Secretary on other options before.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, and my apologies for interrupting, but the Secretary—DHS has been—the agency has stated that Title 42 being lifted will result in 18,000 encounters a day. Is FEMA prepared to handle that volume with a request of \$24 million?

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA's role as it relates to the border is really a coordinating role. We have staff that are assigned to the Southern Border Coordination Center, which is located at CBP Headquarters. Our role will continue to be a coordinating role and will continue to provide funding to the nonprofit agencies through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, and considering that the Emergency Food and Shelter Program has a board that administers these funds, it is comprised of several of the charities that actually themselves re-

ceive funds. So, how do we ensure accountability and what oversight role is of this board that is doling out millions and millions of dollars of taxpayer funds?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, it is a great question, Congresswoman. We have a couple of mechanisms in place to ensure that the funding is being spent appropriately.

First there are local boards for the charities that look at every expenditure to make sure that it is a valid expenditure. Our National board also looks at all of the expenditures to make sure that they are authorized expenditures.

Then we conduct through FEMA and one of our contractors an annual audit of the program to ensure that we are using the funding as the way it was intended.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Would you agree that since FEMA is administering a program at the border that the border is, in fact, a crisis?

Ms. CRISWELL. I would say that the work that we are doing to help coordinate the migrant crossings is in support of our partners at CBP and ICE.

Mrs. CAMMACK. I am out of time, but for the record I have a list of questions that I will submit if the Chairwoman would be so kind. I would appreciate a timely response, Administrator Criswell.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Without objection, the gentlewoman's time has expired. At this time the Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, for 5 minutes.

Ms. Jackson Lee, can you hear us? Ms. Jackson Lee, it looks like you are on mute. We will come back to her.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Green, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Madam Chair, did you yield to me?

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Mr. Green?

Ms. Jackson Lee, can you hear us now?

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Yes, I can.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. OK, great. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you so very much. From the signing—thank you, Madam Chair, for this, and the Ranking Member, for this very important hearing and your leadership.

This is an area that I have been engaged in I guess by necessity coming from hurricane country. I have been a veteran of any number of hurricanes of notoriety, as well-known in America from Katrina to a storm called Storm Alicia that literally obliterated major research in the Texas Medical Center; to Hurricane Ike that drove us to the level of knowing that we needed a coastal spine; and, of course, Hurricane Harvey that magnified the disaster of what can happen to people: Loss of life, loss of property.

So, I want to first thank the administrator for the continued service of her team and the work in particular of Region 6 that I have worked with over the many, many years. But to emphasize that this organization, I think signed into law in 1979, has not gotten the importance focus. We thank President Biden's administration for recognizing an increased budget for FEMA.

So I want to focus on some of the issues. To the Chairwoman, I particularly want to focus on the ailments of the Stafford Act. This is law, but it poses a great hindrance when the impacted

areas of a State have to be totally dependent upon a Governor's late recognition that an area should be declared a disaster.

Administrator, what is the time frame which you can stand up your operation from the moment of an area being called a National disaster?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congresswoman Jackson Lee, thank you for the question. Our role has really been over the last several years to lean forward as we have these notice events. As you in Texas, as we are seeing in the Gulf Coast States, along the East Coast, when we know that there is a hurricane coming, we are going to deploy resources ahead of time, so they can be prepositioned to support the State and the local jurisdictions as soon as it is safe to do so.

Once there is a Presidential disaster declaration that means that they are already in place for us to be able to go in and start providing assistance. But we will also be able to provide assistance under our Surge Fund before we get the final paperwork, if needed.

We have also really been working last year with our Governors to encourage them to ask for pre-landfall disaster declarations. So, if you see a hurricane coming, we want you to ask for this pre-land-fall emergency declaration, so that way we can start moving those resources and then employing them ahead of time, something that we are actually encouraging Governors to do as we can see these events approaching them.

So, we don't have hesitation. We can support immediately.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. But you have to wait upon the declaration, is that correct?

Ms. CRISWELL. We can deploy resource into the area——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. But you cannot——

Ms. CRISWELL [continuing]. Without waiting——

Ms. JACKSON LEE [continuing]. Utilize them.

Ms. CRISWELL [continuing]. And we can use our Surge Fund to employ some resources before a declaration.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. The issue is that the process of assessing the declaration by the Governor sometimes holds up local communities. I just want to put that on the record. I believe that the Stafford Act should be modified to allow local communities that are devastated, particularly maybe large urban and large rural areas, to be able to activate the resources that FEMA has.

Let me move quickly to the idea of staffing. I heard you indicate your faith in your staff, and I certainly have confidence in them. But what are the real needs of FEMA? Is there a move or should there be a move to ensuring more permanent staff to be able to assist in having staff ready for these disasters that seem to be year-round? It is not necessarily hurricanes, but other forms of natural disasters.

Ms. CRISWELL. I would say that the one thing that is going to really make a difference in our ability to staff disasters right now is a bill that is being looked at in the Senate and in Congress. I think Chairwoman Demings, you have been a cosponsor of this bill as well as Congressman Katko, and that is the CREW Act. That is going to give our reservist work force, which is the heartbeat of what we do for disasters. It is the majority of our staff that surge in when an incident happens to support those local communities.

What this act will do is give them USERRA protection, so reemployment protection, which means it will transform the way that we can recruit our reservist work force, bring in specialties to come in and support those jurisdictions, even give us the opportunity to have more reservists that are right in the local community.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I will submit my other questions for the record. I appreciate the administrator. I do want to find out about the decrease in the State Homeland Security Grant Program that has been proposed and would like to help to ensure those funds get reinstated.

But thank you, Administrator, for your service and thank you to the FEMA team. Thank you, Madam Chair, for yielding.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentlewoman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank Administrator Criswell for being with us today. Ensuring a sustainable and effective FEMA budget is critical for the Nation, so I appreciate Administrator Criswell making time today to visit with the subcommittee.

I am also appreciative of the open lines of communication with Administrator Criswell and her office. I am thankful for her candor and her willingness to help. We have spoken on many occasions and the administrator and her staff have never failed to rise to the challenges that we face together.

Recovery after a disaster is far from a straightforward process. As a Congressman who represents a region that is quite accustomed to the impact of powerful hurricanes, I have survived many in the course of my life, but 2 years ago there was a particularly brutal, devastating storm season for South Louisiana. I can personally attest to the frustration many of my constituents face after a disaster. I must say for the record, Madam Chair, that I am uplifted by the level of commitment that my office has received, both officially and through direct communications, from Administrator Criswell and her office.

If we intend to ensure that recovery efforts are resilient and America's Treasury is wisely spent, then timely communication and simplifying the necessary documents and procedures between FEMA and the State and local agencies is imperative. We must streamline the process.

That is why I am thankful to see FEMA request \$51.1 million for grant management modernization practices at the agency and \$19.7 billion for the Disaster Relief Fund. These investments could potentially better serve the communities across the country when a disaster strikes.

Administrator Criswell, regarding the modernization endeavor, would you share with us a little bit how that will work? How will that better serve communities attempting to recover from a disaster?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman Higgins, we are so reliant right now on our IT infrastructure in order to better support communities after a disaster. It has been an amazing resource as we continue to work to improve the way we are delivering services, that we can actually get funding out into the hands of survivors so much

quicker. That includes then our grant modernization process as well. So, when we are talking about after a disaster, we have made a lot of improvements, but we also need to make sure that the access to the work that we do before a disaster through our grant programs is also easier for our customers to be able to navigate.

The funding that we are going to put in to continue to modernize our Grant Modernization Program is building on what we have already started with our BRIC programs, our Building Resilient Infrastructure and Community, and some other hazard mitigation programs; move that into even our recovery programs, our Recovery Grant Programs, so we can better use the data that our customers are giving us at a single instance. So we don't continually ask them for the same information over and over.

I think as we continue this modernization it is just going to make it, again, easier. We are moving barriers from our customers, so they can access the resources that they are eligible for.

Mr. HIGGINS. Well, that would be our shared intention, would be to simplify and streamline the process.

I would like to thank you again for taking time last week to discuss the issues facing a couple of my parishes, Calcasieu and Cameron Parish School Boards, as well as the Lake Charles Housing Authority. My office will continue to work closely with you and your staff, ma'am.

I have received your pledge for continue attention to the matter. I hope you can support that pledge here today with my colleagues.

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman Higgins, I really appreciated the phone call that we had last Friday. I do continue to commit to working with you, providing you an update next week, as we discussed last week, on our progress toward the issues that you identified.

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes, ma'am. We look forward to working very hard together with you and your staff in order to seek final resolution and recovery for so many scores of thousands of South Louisiana citizens that continue to suffer from the brutal storms of 2020.

Madam Chair, my time has expired and I yield.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Green, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you ever so much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, this is an exceedingly important hearing for a multiplicity of reasons, especially associated with Houston, Texas, so I thank you.

I would also like to thank the staff. Ordinarily I draft my own questions, but the staff has done an outstanding job with a couple of questions. I want to commend them. They are capable, competent, and qualified, and they always come through for us when we ask them to, so thank you, staff.

Madam Chair, Houston had about a trillion gallons of water. It was inundated as a result of Hurricane Harvey. After that we sought help with the GLO after the Federal Government sent funds to the GLO to disburse and help the people who were the victims of Hurricane Harvey.

Well, as fate would have it, the GLO decided that Houston should get zero dollars initially as well as Harris County, which is

the county Houston is located in. Then there was some talk and the GLO decided that, well, Harris County can receive some help, but Houston is still receiving zero dollars. The monies that would come to Houston, the area that was most devastated, which was the epicenter, will eventually go to other areas where we have persons who were not harmed by Harvey to some extent and maybe some to a very—some extent that is much less than those in Houston.

So, my question to the Chair is—pardon me, to the—let me make sure I have got your title right. OK, Ms. Criswell, my question to you is how can FEMA help us to ensure that we get equity when soliciting these funds? How can you solicit funds and disburse funds to FEMA to—excuse me, GLO such that it would treat cities like Houston fairly?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman Green, mitigation is one of my top priorities, right? We need to be able to take a lot of the efforts that FEMA is doing and work toward what we can do to prevent or reduce the impacts that we are seeing from these natural disasters. I am aware and appreciate the struggles that Harris County and Houston is facing with their increased flooding.

We do have a number of programs. The one that you are mentioning is our Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, which is a post-disaster program and it is administered through the State. I mean, it is a passthrough through the State and which would mean it would go through GLO in your case.

But we also have pre-disaster mitigation funding, like our Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program and our flood mitigation assistance, which you can apply directly to FEMA. I would be happy to have my regional office get in touch with your staff to talk about ways that we can make sure that they are taking advantage of these pre-disaster programs as well.

Mr. GREEN. I would greatly appreciate it. Can that happen rather quickly? Because there are other things that are happening with reference to GLO and this can have an impact. So, how will we perfect this? Will someone contact my staff today? If so, I will give you the proper person to contact.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. My staff will follow up with your team immediately following this hearing and will be able to make those connections. I will just, you know, acknowledge that hazard mitigation programs are usually complicated programs that do take time. So these programs aren't projects that can be put in place quickly.

Mr. GREEN. I understand. Well, my chief of staff is Niha Razi and we would greatly appreciate it if you would make an effort to contact her.

Let me quickly move on, Administrator. My apologies for my earlier faux pas. I am sorry about that. But 18 percent of the unhoused community in Houston said that they were homeless. Homelessness is a real problem. I have worked with people, I am a hands-on Congressperson, as the case was made with my colleagues, and I have worked with homeless people. I know the difficulty they have when we have these natural disasters.

So, my question to you is simply this, those who are experiencing homelessness, what can we do to assure that they will get the proper assistance that they merit when we have these catastrophes?

Ms. CRISWELL. Homelessness is certainly an issue that is increasing across our Nation and it is compounded even more for those individuals after a natural disaster. Again, I would offer the assistance of my regional administrator and our team to work with communities to help them with their preparedness plans. Individuals are always eligible to request assistance and register for assistance through FEMA once a natural disaster has been declared by the President. Then they are eligible for some resources in our individual assistance programs.

Mr. GREEN. Well, thank you very much. I look forward to hearing from your team. I yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Garbarino, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARBARINO. Thank you, Madam Chair, and to the Ranking Member for holding this hearing. Thank you, administrator, for being here.

Ms. Criswell, I have a few questions. This year I led the fiscal year 2023 New York bipartisan delegation letter to the Appropriations Committee requesting robust funding for FEMA State and local grants to provide much-needed resilience funding to mitigate man-made and natural risks. You have talked a lot about these grants already today.

Last month, this subcommittee heard from the Major Cities Chiefs Association with concerns that these preparedness grants do not appropriately solicit law enforcement input given their role in implementing such grants in their respective cities. As Congress continues to provide robust funding to FEMA for these preparedness grants, how do you plan to ensure that FEMA's appropriately soliciting law enforcement input to ensure the safety of New Yorkers and all Americans?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, our preparedness grants, as I mentioned earlier, have been such an instrumental part in increasing our capacity across the country, and law enforcement is a big piece of that. They are definitely a partner in our ability to be able to increase capacity to prevent terrorist attacks.

We do extensive outreach and engagement to include law enforcement communities. But I would be happy to get with your staff to find out if there is an area that we are missing, so we can continue to work on making sure we have all the appropriate stakeholders at the table.

I would also point out, though, this year as well in our Urban Area Security Initiative and our Homeland Security grants that we actually increased the amount of funding that is to be spent on law enforcement. I don't remember the exact percentage of the top of my head, but recognizing the importance that our law enforcement community places or has—the role they have in our ability to be prepared, we have increased that amount of funding to be spent on their ability to increase their capacity.

Mr. GARBARINO. We appreciate that increase. I think that is great. But just maybe the communication between—and that is—I am just brining up a problem that the Major Cities Chiefs Association brought up to us, that there doesn't seem to be communica-

tion between FEMA and—or enough communication and law enforcement when they are determining these grants.

So, I appreciate the increase in funding. I think that is great. But, you know, and we can facilitate through my office, also, if you would like to do that. But just having some more communication I think is what they would like to see.

On a second note, and I know you talked about—a couple of people have already asked about the State and local Cybersecurity Grant Programs. Last we spoke to CISA they had told us that they thought the grant program was going to be up and running late spring or early summer. We are now in early summer. Can you provide an update on the time line? If you already answered this question, I apologize, but what is the time line for the roll-out here?

Ms. CRISWELL. I don't have the exact time line in front of me, Congressman, but I know that we are working closely with CISA to develop the Notice of Funding Opportunity. The last update I received is that that Notice of Funding Opportunity is going to come out sometime this summer. But I will certainly follow up with my team and their conversations with CISA, and we will get back to your staff.

Mr. GARBARINO. So, I just want to—FEMA is running—or CISA is doing the technological part of this, right? FEMA is overseeing it? What is FEMA's role in this, in the grant program?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, absolutely. So, FEMA is the fiduciary agent. We will administer the grant on behalf of CISA, but they set all of the requirements. They are the subject-matter experts. They will define the parameters in which individuals or organizations can request assistance and then they will review the grant applications to make allocation determinations.

Mr. GARBARINO. So, and this is a huge issue, it is a huge grant program, we are very excited about it. The money needs to get out the door because cybersecurity waits for no one.

So, is FEMA ready today to do what it needs to do? Is it just waiting for CISA to finish setting up the program or what is the delay? Because, like I said, last we heard it was late spring or early summer. You know, we are in early summer.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Congressman, I hadn't heard that time line, so I don't know specifically what the delay will be. Again, we are working really closely with CISA. This is a brand-new grant program and we want to make sure that we get the requirements right, so we can reach out to those organizations that are going to benefit the most from this new grant program.

Mr. GARBARINO. So, but your working relationship with CISA right now, it is good? There is no hiccups there?

Ms. CRISWELL. Not that I am aware of.

Mr. GARBARINO. All right. Thank you, Administrator. My time is out, I yield back. Thank you.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from New Jersey, Mrs. Watson Coleman, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you. I want to thank the Chairwoman and Ranking Member for holding this hearing. Madam Administrator, thank you for the information you are sharing.

I represent the 12th Congressional District, which includes the capital city of that State, and that is Trenton. My understanding is that ABC News reported that residents of Trenton, New Jersey, are still waiting for assistance from FEMA after Hurricane Ida. It has been a long 9 months for those in need of assistance and they are still waiting for support.

Can you speak to why there have been delays in assistance to residents in Trenton? Can I have your commitment that you will work to resolve this 9-month-long waiting period for FEMA assistance?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman Watson Coleman, I don't have the specifics of the institutions that you are talking about. I am certainly happy to get with my team after this and get more detail from your staff, and then we can get you a more informed answer.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. All right. We certainly will follow up because this is very urgent and we all know the population that is in greatest need. In the city of Trenton there is a population that tends to get underserved because of its socioeconomic status.

Madam Administrator, severe weather is becoming our new normal in the face of climate change. Heat waves in particular cause more death annually in the United States than any other severe weather event. FEMA has historically devoted very few resources to address extreme heat. Given that last year 80 percent of Americans experienced a heat wave, last week I introduced the Stay Cool Act, H.R. 7949, to study, mitigate, and address the impacts of extreme heat.

What actions, if any, is FEMA taking to address and mitigate the growing threat of extreme heat?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congresswoman, we are very concerned about extreme heat and the heat that we are continuing to see be exacerbated by climate change. We know that as these heat domes continue to rise, the fatalities are going to continue to rise. There are more fatalities every year from heat than any other natural disaster. We also see secondary fatalities after a disaster as a result of the heat.

We monitor the heat conditions very closely. We work very closely with our partners at the National Weather Service and coordinate with our regional and State partners to help with their preparedness plans. We will continue to work with them and to help them better understand what their risk is for heat.

We actually have a resilience analysis and planning tool that helps communities identify their vulnerable populations and they can use this information to put better plans in place to support those populations if they are going to experience a heat emergency.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. All right. Given the fact that we kind of agree that because of climate change we are going to be experiencing so much more of this extreme heat, and the fact it was just recently predicted there was going to be this heat emergency that we are going to experience this summer, is there anything specific in terms of resources and time frames that FEMA could report to us that it is doing, recognizing that it has become a real crisis situation here?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think if you are asking about resources in the terms of data, we are happy to work through some analysis and

some data to better understand the increasing threat that we are experiencing. We also can work with our local communities to help them access information on ready.gov that helps them, again, put some plans in place to support these heat-related events.

I think the biggest thing that we as a Nation and an emergency management community needs to do is understand the threats that we are going to face in the next 5 and 10 years, heat is certainly one of them——

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Yes.

Ms. CRISWELL [continuing]. And working together now to build preparedness plans on how we are going to respond.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you. I have two quick questions. I am going to ask them. They are totally different ends of the spectrum.

No. 1 is I am still concerned about the ability to create an inclusive, diverse environment in leadership as well as in employees. I want to know what FEMA is doing with regard to that.

Last, I want to know are nonprofit clinics that are health care-related and that also perform—make available pregnancy terminations, are they eligible under the programs that you identify?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congresswoman, I want to make sure I heard you correctly. Did you say pregnancy determinations?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Terminations. Abortions.

Ms. CRISWELL. I am still not understanding the word.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I want to know if the nonprofit organizations that provide health care, in addition they provide abortions to people, are they eligible for the grant program for safety and security that you mentioned earlier?

Ms. CRISWELL. I see what you are saying. So, certain nonprofit agencies, organizations are eligible for reimbursement after a disaster, and they have to meet certain criteria as far as a certified 501(c)(3). We would have to see the specifics on each individual organization to see if they meet our criteria as defined in the Stafford Act for a nonprofit organization.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Well, I am sorry. I was really interested in the Nonprofit Security Grant. I don't think that they are predicated upon an—a response to a disaster. They are kind-of——

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. [continuing]. Protective in nature. I just wanted to know if these entities were eligible——

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. [continuing]. If that is a yes or no.

Ms. CRISWELL. They would have to be——

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentlewoman's time has expired, but the witness may answer the question.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, they would have the same qualification requirements to meet—in the Stafford Act on what qualifies as a nonprofit organization.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Torres, for 5 minutes.

Mr. TORRES. Thank you, Madam Chair. Administrator Criswell, you were the commissioner for emergency management in New York and I was a New York City council member——

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. TORRES [continuing]. During the peak of the pandemic, so I have a few questions about COVID. George Kennan once described the First World War as the seminal catastrophe of the 20th Century. Those words come to mind when I think of COVID-19, which has become the seminal catastrophe of the 21st Century. Nowhere has COVID been more catastrophic than in New York, which emerged early on as Ground Zero for the global pandemic.

The health care providers in New York, which were hit the earliest and hardest by COVID, have dire concerns about the glacial pace of FEMA's reimbursement. Hospitals in New York are bleeding and instead of treating it as an emergency, it feels to us like FEMA is moving bureaucratically as though it were business as usual.

On February 17, 2022, the whole New York delegation, Democrats and Republicans, sent a bipartisan letter calling for rapid distribution of FEMA public assistance program funds. How much longer must we wait to receive the funds we need to fully recover from COVID?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, I certainly appreciate your question and I remember very clearly and vividly my time responding and working with the hospitals in New York City as we were trying to get our heads wrapped around what it was going to take to combat COVID-19.

We are working very closely, my regional office, Region 2 office is working very closely with Health + Hospitals and the other hospitals, nonprofit hospitals in the New York City area to help advance funding. One of the things that we can do is we don't have to wait for the entire project to have all of the data, so we can reimburse it in its entirety. We can reimburse it apportionately.

So we have done that with several of the hospitals. If there are specific hospitals that are still having difficulty, I would be happy to get that specific information, but we are working very closely with them. As they have information that we can submit, then we would obligate that money for them.

Mr. TORRES. During COVID we saw our health care heroes put their lives at risk during the peak of the pandemic so that everyone else could safely shelter in place. Many hospitals in New York provided our health care heroes with hazard pay, not out of preference, but out of necessity for work force retention in a moment of crisis. Do you believe as I do that hazard pay for our health care heroes was a critical component of the response to COVID-19?

Ms. CRISWELL. I do believe that we had to use creative funding sources to make sure that we were getting the qualified staff to come in and support these critical needs in these hospitals. I am unfamiliar with an increase in hazard pay as I know we were using contract resources, also, from——

Mr. TORRES. But you recognize that hazard pay could be a critical tool for sustaining and retaining a work force that is in danger of burning out and turning over in a global pandemic?

Ms. CRISWELL. I do believe hazard pay could be used as a critical tool.

Mr. TORRES. Was, in fact, used, right? It is not theoretical.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. TORRES. It was, in fact, used during COVID. FEMA's policy is as follows with respect to hazard pay: "FEMA cannot reimburse the hazardous retention bonuses because the applicant did not have a pre-disaster labor policy for hazardous duty retention bonuses, meaning the justification for paying the bonuses was not adequately documented." I have two responses.

First, the justification was adequately documented. It was COVID-19.

Ms. CRISWELL. Mm-hmm.

Mr. TORRES. But second, expecting applicants to have a pre-existing policy is nonsensical because the hazard pay was itself an emergency response to COVID. Like whether there was a pre-existing policy should be irrelevant. What should matter is whether the hazard pay was necessitated by the response to COVID.

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, I know that we have existing policies that talk about—we have policies that talk about having pre-existing policies at local jurisdictions for overtime. I am not familiar specifically with what you are talking about in our response to hazard pay. I am certainly happy to go take a look at that and see if there is any flexibility within our policy to address that.

Mr. TORRES. I hope you can rethink the requirement for a pre-disaster policy because we are denying our health care heroes the hazard pay they deserve.

I have a question about Puerto Rico. One would think in the 21st Century every person and every place in America would have reliable electricity, but the reality is different and much darker in Puerto Rico, which has seen a never-ending cycle of power failures. What role is FEMA going to play in expediting the rebuilding of Puerto Rico's electric grid, which is nothing short of an emergency?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Congressman, we have a large team that we have put in place in Puerto Rico, working very closely with PREPA and the Puerto Rican government as they are rebuilding from Hurricane Maria. We are working hand-in-hand with them as they have projects to help them, again, expedite some of the payments to get things moving faster, but also working with them on these longer-term, complicated projects that just take time to finish and complete.

But I have a large team over there that is working hand-in-hand and we have continuous engagement the Puerto Rico Governor as well as the staff there to ensure that we are meeting their needs.

Mr. TORRES. My time has expired.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman's time has expired. Administrator Criswell, that concludes our first round of questions. We do have time for a second round of questions. Members who are interested in participating, please remain in the hearing room or turn your cameras on.

I will recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Administrator, you said a minute ago that what we need to do as a Nation is to really focus on the threats that we will face in the next 5 to 10 years. I could not agree with you more. We know

that climate change is all around us, we focused a bit on that, but I am reminded of the unbelievable tornadoes in North Florida, the unbelievable flooding in South Florida.

Please discuss the ways that FEMA is investing in order to mitigate activities to prepare for the acute threats brought on by climate change.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. I think the future that FEMA needs to play here and the role that we need to play is to really emphasize our participation and our expertise in increasing individual preparedness, but also reducing the impacts of disasters through our mitigation programs. Many individuals see FEMA as a response-and-recovery agency. My goal by the end of my tenure is to make sure that they also recognize our role in being a resilience agency, increasing individual resilience and community resilience.

Our Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program is our landmark program that is really bring in more money than we have ever been able to invest in communities. Our focus is to work with communities to help them take a system-based approach, a community-wide approach instead of an incremental approach, so we can have greater impact to protect more parts of these communities.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. You know, in addition to acknowledging as a body that climate change is real, how can Congress assist you in your efforts or your short-term and long-term plan over the next 5 to 10 years?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. Chairwoman Demings, I always appreciate the support that Congress gives us in funding our mitigation programs year after year. As we have additional needs, we would look forward to working with Congress to make sure that we are really being able to build resilient communities across this Nation.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much for that. We have already shared a couple of success stories regarding the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. But you know what we found out is that many organizations, whether they are places of worship or colleges and universities, just are not aware, communities are not aware of the program in the first place. What has FEMA—or what steps has FEMA taken to make sure that communities are aware of the Nonprofit Security Grant Programs and other similar funding that is available?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. Chairwoman, a really important question because if we have funding available, but nobody knows about it, then we are not doing our due diligence and making sure that we are increasing resiliency across the Nation. I would say we do this in a couple of ways.

One, we have increased our amount of stakeholder engagement and outreach through our resilience programs, through our grant programs, through an engagement through our regional administrators, but also our Office of Faith-Based and Community Services. Right? They have done an extensive amount of outreach to help people understand ahead of time that this grant program is going to be available and that they can start to prepare now for that grant program.

We have also increased and gave additional points to organizations that have never applied before. So, we want to give an incen-

tive to nonprofit organizations that have not asked for this funding or received this funding, and give them additional points so it encourages more organizations to seek out this program and apply for assistance.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Administrator, as you know, I am proud to cosponsor the FEMA Equity Act along with Chairman Thompson. You spoke earlier about just some of the structural issues that result in inequities as it pertains to disaster response. Can you discuss the importance of these actions based on your work to increase equity in FEMA?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. I would really like to highlight a couple of our programs within our Individual Assistance Program. I mentioned it a little bit in my opening remarks. We are really committed to increasing the—or I would say reducing the barriers that individuals and communities have to accessing our programs. We were able to make some simple policy changes last year to increase our equitable delivery.

Those changes that I mentioned in my opening remarks about changing the types of documentation we accept allowed 42,000 homeowners and over 53,000 renters receive assistance from FEMA that just a year before we would have denied assistance. I think that the total amount was about \$350 million. This is really substantial of understanding the barriers that individuals and communities have to receiving our assistance, really taking the time to understand it, and then looking at why our policy is creating that barrier and what can we do to change that policy.

We are continuing to look at our policies, but we are also looking at future legislative or rulemaking changes that we can do for long-term changes to helping ensure that those that need our help the most can access it.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Administrator. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, for 5 minutes.

Ms. Jackson Lee.

OK. Let me just make sure there are no other Members who are prepared to ask questions during the second round. Ms. Jackson Lee.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Can you hear me?

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Yes, I can. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you very much. Administrator, let me quickly just go back to the question I originally asked and just a quick response to the decrease to the State Homeland Security Grant Program and to the Urban Area Security Initiative Program. Do you know why that was proposed as a decrease?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, ma'am. So, again, our suite of Homeland Security grants are an essential part of increasing capacity across the country. We have slightly decreased the amount of funding that is within the UASI and the State Homeland Security Grant Program. But, at the same time, we have added in new grants such as our Cybersecurity Grant Program and increased the funding within our Nonprofit Security Grant program. I mean, we feel that this is a good balance to build capacity in areas where we don't have capa-

bility yet while sustaining the capacity that we have already built across the country with our other two programs.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. So, let me then follow up on the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. I would like to work with the Budget Committee and work with the budget going forward to see how we can balance that. I believe it is a very important priority for this committee and for me dealing with the Nonprofit Security Grant Programs, particularly after recent threats to houses of worship and HBCUs. You are requesting \$360 million. I assume that is a plus-up, an increase of \$110 million.

So, can you elaborate on the importance of this program and are there more that FEMA and the Department can do to support these particular programs? This is——

Ms. CRISWELL. Congresswoman——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Yes.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Congresswoman. As Secretary Mayorkas, you know, he has really called for the significant increase that we are seeing in this grant program because of the rise in the types of threats that we are seeing to nonprofit organizations across the country, in particular the houses of worship as well as our HBCUs.

This is an incredible program, again, to build capacity in an area that we just have not invested funding in and something that our Homeland Security Grant and our UASI Program has not addressed. So we want to continue to use this Nonprofit Security Grant Program to build this capability in an area that does not have the same capability that we are seeing in other parts of our emergency management enterprise.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Well, I think the administration has very good intentions. I would like to find a way to support the Nonprofit Security Grant Program and still keep some of these important programs that I mentioned that did lose dollars, that are so very important to local areas in the midst of disasters.

I also want to put forward my FEMA restructuring bill that I look forward, Administrator, to discussing with the administration and strengthening FEMA's infrastructure personnel. I think we already discussed it. I clearly want to provide the sort of support system that FEMA staffing needs.

Would you just again for the record restate the importance of ensuring the mental well-being, the financial resources, the payments, and the sensitivity to FEMA employees having to move around, leaving their home most times, to address disasters?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congresswoman Jackson Lee, I appreciate your on-going support and commitment to our work force. Again, we can't do what we do without them and they are incredible servants of the public.

As I stated earlier, you know, we are taking a look at how we can better structure our work force to respond to this increase in the demand of natural disasters that we are experiencing. My team is continuing to provide technical drafting assistance to you for the bill that you had put forward.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I wanted to emphasize particularly the mental health. I have seen them work in very stressful moments. Is some of the funding working to ensure their well-being as it relates to

mental health, dealing with disasters and the terrible impact of disasters?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, ma'am. The mental health of our work force is an incredible priority for me and we have put a number of programs in place to make sure that we are very focused on supporting the mental health of our work force. Part of our budget request will continue to support and expand the type of assistance that we are able to provide.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. I look forward to really discussing the legislation that I have. I thank the Chairwoman for yielding and her leadership, and the Ranking Member. Thank you all so very much.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentlewoman yields back. With that, Administrator Criswell, I thank you for your valuable testimony. I thank the Members for their questions. The Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for the witness and we ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions. The Chair reminds Members that the committee record will remain open for 10 business days.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you, Chairwoman.

[Whereupon, at 11:33 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR DEANNE CRISWELL

Question 1. Last month, Senator Warren, Chairwoman Demings, and I introduced the “FEMA Equity Act” (HR 7668). The bill was drafted after the State of Mississippi failed to do its part to address devastation caused by the June floods in the Mississippi Delta. This legislation would improve FEMA’s data collection systems and require the agency to incorporate equity criteria throughout its policies and programming. It also codifies in law the Equity Advisor and the Equity Enterprise Steering Group that you have established.

Based on your work to increase equity at FEMA, can you discuss the importance of these actions, specifically improved data collection, integrating equity criteria into FEMA policies and programs, the Equity Advisor and the Equity Enterprise Steering Group?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2a. Members of the Committee on Homeland Security have witnessed numerous instances of State governments ignoring or discriminating against certain communities in need after a disaster. For example, during this hearing, Mr. Green discussed how the Texas Grant Land Office directed Federal funds from Hurricane Harvey to wealthier, White inland communities, failing to direct any of a billion dollars in Federal funds to flood-prone communities in Houston. I have personally seen the State of Mississippi ignore the needs of my district. After the flooding last June, the Mississippi failed to even ask for a joint preliminary damage assessment.

What can FEMA do to help ensure that States allocate Federal funds equitably?

Question 2b. What can FEMA do to help ensure that States allocate Federal funds equitably?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION FROM CHAIRWOMAN VAL DEMINGS FOR DEANNE CRISWELL

Question. The Stafford Act’s nondiscrimination provision was intentionally constructed by Congress to be broad in order to allow FEMA to implement equitable policies.¹ Congress intended to prevent the consequences of current policies, which although appear neutral, often lead to disparate impacts.² The committee has heard from advocacy groups that FEMA has interpreted the law in a way that limits the agency’s ability to implement equitable policies and programs that address various communities’ specific needs.

How does FEMA interpret the Stafford Act’s nondiscrimination provision to advance equitable and fair policies and programming?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION FROM HONORABLE ANDREW GARBARINO FOR DEANNE CRISWELL

Question. It was not long ago that Superstorm Sandy devastated much of my district on Long Island. For many of my constituents, Sandy caused such catastrophic damage that they are still recovering from it today. In fact, most of my constituents’ lives will never be the same. However, we know that taking the right steps around pre-disaster mitigation will save not only lives, but also countless taxpayer dollars, as multiple studies show that for every dollar spent on better protecting our communities from climate events, \$11 are saved in future costs. One such program that helps Long Islanders build homes resiliently is the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program, which was created by the 2018 Disaster Recov-

¹Hannah Perls and Dane Underwood, *Equitable Disaster Relief: An Analysis of FEMA’s Legal Authority to Integrate Equity under the Stafford Act*, October 20, 2021, <http://eelp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/Equitable-Disaster-Relief-Perls-Underwood-PDF.pdf>.

²Ibid.

ery Reform Act. While Congress intended dollars provided to communities through the BRIC Program to be used toward strengthening building code enforcement, I have heard from countless Long Islanders that they either are unclear on how to properly use the awarded BRIC funds or are unable to use the funds toward the program's intended purpose. Administrator Criswell, have you heard whether BRIC Program recipients are having issues with using awarded funds, and if so, does FEMA have any plans to address this issue?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

